

IMPROVING CARE FOR VETERANS WITH POLYTRAUMA AND BLAST- RELATED INJURIES

More than 18,000 service members have been wounded in action or killed in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and thousands of those who were wounded suffered blast-related injuries. Improvised explosive devices, blast (high-pressure waves), landmines, and explosive fragments now account for the majority of combat injuries. Most of these blast/explosion-related injuries are polytraumatic, meaning that they result in impairments in more than one body system or organ. New systems of care are being developed to address the rehabilitation needs of service members with these complex injuries, especially veterans returning from OEF and OIF. For example, through January 2006 nearly one-third (more than 600) of those service members with battlefield injuries severe enough to warrant evacuation from Iraq to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center had traumatic brain injury, and the majority of those cases were blast-related.

Priority: Post-Deployment Healthcare Challenges

The Polytrauma and Blast-Related Injuries Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (PT/BRI-QUERI) was established in October, 2005 to identify and implement best evidence-based practices for the post-deployment healthcare challenges presented by modern warfare. PT/BRI-QUERI is dedicated to promoting the successful rehabilitation, psychological adjustment, and community re-integration of men and women who have experienced polytrauma and blast-related injuries. This QUERI center also focuses on coordination of care across healthcare systems, including the Department of Defense (DoD), VHA, as well as facility-based and community-based care.

Needs Assessment

The VA has designated four Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers – located in Minneapolis, MN, Palo Alto, CA, Richmond, VA, and Tampa, FL – to provide specialized rehabilitation treatment and expand clinical expertise in polytraumatic injuries throughout the VA. PT/BRI-QUERI is partnering closely with these Centers to identify needs and gaps in care, as well as best practices. Two HSR&D funded rapid response projects will help to characterize high-priority problems, treatment innovations, and sources of variation across the four Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers:

- **Provider perceived needs:** PT/BRI-QUERI investigators are using qualitative methods to examine care processes and provider perceived needs at each Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. For more information, contact Dr. Greta Friedmann-Sanchez at greta.friedemann-sanchez@va.gov. This study is funded by HSR&D.
- **High-Priority problems and outcomes among inpatients:** This is an observational study of combat-injured service members who received inpatient rehabilitation treatment at one of the four Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers. The goal is to describe injury types, impairments, treatment, and predictors of out-

come. Methods involve in-depth chart review and the use of VA's extensive and comprehensive administrative database. For more information, contact Dr. Nina Sayer at Nina.sayer@va.gov. This study is funded by HSR&D.

Other PT/BRI Funded Studies

- **Study of Treatment and Costs of Combat-Related Blast Injuries:** PT/BRI investigators at the Tampa VAMC are examining the types of injuries, complications, outcomes, healthcare utilization, and costs associated with providing inpatient rehabilitation to veterans with polytraumatic injuries. For more information, contact Kris Siddharthan, PhD at kris.siddharthan@va.gov. This is an HSR&D funded study.
- **Community Reintegration for Injured Soldiers (CRIS): Phase I :** The purpose of this project is to generate a reliable and valid instrument to assess community reintegration among war-injured veterans. Expert opinion as well as interviews with injured service members and their families are being used to generate data for analysis. This study is being conducted in conjunction with the VAMC in Providence, RI. For more information, contact Linda Resnik at Linda_Resnik@brown.edu. This is a Rhode Island Foundation funded grant.
- **Life Care Planning for Polytrauma Victims of War and Terrorists:** The Palo Alto Polytrauma Center, in conjunction with the National Center for PTSD, is pilot-testing life care planning as a method for projecting polytrauma victims' lifetime medical and mental health service needs. The study is being conducted by Joseph Bleiberg, PhD; Henry Lew, MD, PhD; Gregory Leskin, PhD; Dennis Reeves, PhD; and Javaid Sheikh, MD. Funding is provided by DoD.

How Do I Learn More ?

For more information about PT/BRI-QUERI, contact:

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WEB RESOURCES

For more information about PT/BRI-QUERI, visit:

www.hsrd.minneapolis.med.va.gov/ptqueri

For more information about the QUERI program in general,
visit the national QUERI website at:

www.hsrd.research.va.gov/queri

Access QUERI's "Guide for Implementing Evidence-Based Clinical
Practice and Conducting Implementation Research" at:

www.hsrd.research.va.gov/queri/implementation

The PT/BRI-QUERI Executive Committee

Each QUERI Executive Committee is co-chaired by research and clinician experts. The research coordinator for the PT/BRI-QUERI is **Nina Sayer, PhD**, and the clinical co-coordinators are **Barbara Sigford, MD, PhD**, and **Steven Scott, DO**. This executive committee brings together a diverse group of researchers, clinicians and leaders from VA, DoD, and consumer organizations committed to improving care for individuals with polytrauma and blast-related injuries. The PT/BRI-QUERI Executive Committee members include: Judith Babcock-Parziale, PhD; John Brown, MD; Adam Darkins, MD; **Greta Friedemann-Sanchez, PhD** (Implementation Research Coordinator); Robert Kerns, PhD; Laurent Lehmann, MD; Henry Lew, MD, PhD; Audrey Nelson, PhD, RN; Paul Pasquina, MD; Patricia Rossbach, RN; Robert Smith, EdD, MCP; and Deborah Warden, MD.